

CULTURAL ATTITUDE TOWARD DEATH

76d It is a mistake to interpret any of these patterns of death behavior as due  
 764 to fear of contamination from contact with the corpse. There are no purification  
 rites, no special class of corpse attendants, and no fear of the corpse,  
 of the property of the deceased, or of the house in which he died. The  
 underlying idea in mourning is one of overwhelming sorrow which unites the  
 mourners for ordinary social intercourse. It is best for them to live in retire-  
 ment until the sorrow has drained away and the heart is made anew by the  
 passage of time. The validity of this feeling is borne out by the attitude of the  
 769 Pukapukans toward the cemetery itself. Unlike our own feeling that a ceme-  
 761 tery is consecrated ground, where attitudes of quietness and respect are in  
 order, the Pukapukan feels that no different behavior is required in a ceme-  
 tery from that allowable on a main road; and this holds true even if there are  
 mourners watching the grave. Trails to talo beds, outer beach, and coconut  
 lands lead through the cemeteries, and people pass to and fro at all times. If  
 one goes to a cemetery to a funeral or to study gravestone construction, it is  
 legitimate to joke, laugh, and be noisy. One may sit down on headstones,  
 rest one's feet on a grave, even sit on a grave; one may smoke in the ceme-  
 tery, expectorate anywhere, and generally do anything one wishes. In taking  
 a short cut through a cemetery one may walk over graves, tramp where one  
 will. These things are not only permissible but are done every day by the  
 native Pukapukans. In many of the cemeteries close to the villages, children  
 play about the headstones, clothes are laid out on the graves to bleach, pan-  
 danus leaves are dried close by, and coconuts are stacked against the head-  
 stones. There is a prevailing feeling of great familiarity, none at all of holy  
 awe or religious fear, whether the cemetery is mainly pagan Pukapukan or  
 769 Christian Pukapukan. Along with this familiarity during daylight goes an  
 761 intense fear of the spirits of the dead at night, and he is a brave Pukapukan  
 715 indeed who would walk through a cemetery at night, even in full moonlight.  
 But this is a fear of spirits of the dead and does not affect the point that  
 the Pukapukan attitude toward death is one of realism and matter-of-factness  
 in an extreme degree.

PERSONALITY JUDGMENTS

521 It is not easy to get at the meanings of words used in characterizing  
 people in a society such as that of Pukapuka, where everyone gossips in-  
 609 tensely about his neighbors but where no one admits that such gossip ever  
 occurs. Any informant could give a list of many words, all suggesting  
 626 interesting personality types; but when asked to apply these words to the  
 behavior of particular people in the community, none would mention names  
 but were content with vague references. Only in the greatest secrecy, for  
 instance, did one give the name of a woman who was generally considered